

Forbes' threshing machine. Robey running the blower at left and Dave Hamnett on top of the machine.

Threshing in Alpine

Fall was the threshing season in Alpine. The latter part of August and first of September was ripening time and the grain would be cut in early days by hand with a sickle, a short curved blade on a short handle, or a cradle scythe which was a long slightly curved blade on a long handle. The grain stalks would then have to be gathered up and piled by hand.

When the grain was dry it would be shelled out by placing it on a canvass on the ground and beating it with a stick or flail or stomping on it. If there was a large amount, oxen would be driven over it, then on a windy day the grain would be slowly poured from a container at a high position, letting the wind blow out the chaff. The large heavier stalks and debris that the wind couldn't take out, had to be plucked out by hand. Some fields developed a disease called smut, which slowly changed the grains to black dust or soot. What good grain was left had to be washed in tubs of water and spread out to thoroughly dry before it could be used or stored for human consumption.

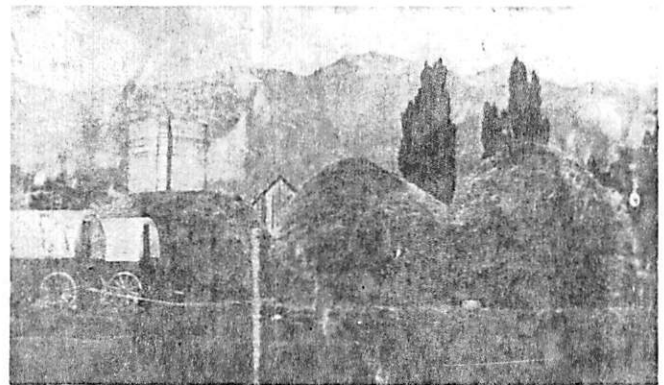
When the twine binder, a machine that cut the grain and tied it into bundles with binding twine, was invented in 1878, the farmers were elated. Most people could not afford a machine themselves so several would form a partnership and buy one together and then do custom work for others, taking grain, labor or other means if money wasn't available. The first binders were pulled by horses, then many years later by tractors.

Six or eight bundles of grain would be stood up in shocks throughout the field and left to dry before being hauled into the stackyard. If the grain wasn't completely dry before being stacked it would sometimes mildew and spoil the grain or heat and set the stack

on fire. This happened if there was a long wait for the threshing machine to come, as you had to wait your turn.

The bundles were placed in round stacks, heads toward the center, layer by layer resembling a bee-hive. A canvas was put over the top to keep wet weather from soaking down through the stacks. Most yards contained from two to five or six stacks, consisting mostly of wheat with maybe a stack of oats or barley. The machine had to be adjusted to thresh out the different grains.

John Devey ran the first two threshing machines in Alpine. They were pulled and powered by horses. As detailed information can be obtained from encyclopedias and other books on machinery through the years this story will proceed with episodes in Alpine. Sometimes, when the grain crop was heavy, machines from surrounding communities came in to help. It was best to get the job over with before bad weather set in.



F.O. McDaniel owned many sheep and cattle. His lot at 303 North Grove Drive contained eight or ten stacks of grain each year.